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ABSTRACT

Australia has a unique range of language communities and language education needs. A variety of languages is currently offered to different groups of learners through diverse programs. Language teaching may be provided through bilingual education, limited-exposure programs, or compulsory language instruction. Federal and state education agencies, policies, and curriculum initiatives further complicate the language teaching situation and increase the need to coordinate policy with curriculum development. New developments in language teaching also make curriculum change desirable. The Australian Language Levels (ALL) Project is evolving from these influences. The ALL Project focuses on the coordination of change in language education by supporting and facilitating changes already occurring in language education, bringing coherence to the language field at the national level, and producing guidelines to assist in this process. To date, the project has produced two conceptual bases or frameworks for change: an organizational framework for describing language learning at different educational levels, and a curricular framework, or guidelines, for teachers and instructional developers. The curricular guidelines address the principles, goals, and activities of language learning. The curricular framework is deemed to be theoretically and methodologically applicable to the teaching of English as a second language as well as to foreign language instruction. (MSE)

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THE AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGE LEVELS (ALL) PROJECT - A RESPONSE TO CURRICULUM NEEDS IN AUSTRALIA

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1.0 CURRICULUM NEEDS

Australia is a unique country from the point of view of languages education. The uniqueness results from the range of language speech communities which exist, the changing nature of the language of these communities and the particular policies regarding multiculturalism and languages which are in place both at federal and state levels. A number of needs arise from such a context of diversity and political complexity, all of which have particular implications for the languages curriculum.

1.1 The context of diversity

A range of languages is currently offered to a range of leaners through a range of programs.

The **range of languages** currently offered in schools includes languages which are spoken widely by community groups, and those which are promoted for purposes of cultural, political, trade or economic significance. English as a Second Language is taught throughout the country in a variety of programs according to the needs of learners, and is available at matriculation or Year 12 level in some States (for example South Australia). There are in fact 26 to 30 languages, assessed Year 12 level in this country.

The resulting **range of language leaners** in Australian schools is of central importance and presents significant challenges for language educators. First of all, the general learning needs and the language learning needs of students change as they move through the various phases of schooling from K-12. Students may begin learning a language at various entry points between K-12; the range of previous experience in the language learning of students creates a variety of needs in language programs. Programs need to be provided for second language learners i.e. those who enter a language program with no previous experience of the target language, and learners who have had contact with the target language in their home life.

It is useful to refer to learners who have contact with the target language in their home as "background speakers" rather than "first language speakers" or "mother-tongue speakers". The term "background speakers" represents an attempt to recognise the fact that there is a continuum of learners in this group - ranging from those who regularly speak a language other than English at home, to those who have a more restricted contact with the language (for example listening to, perhaps speaking with their grandparents).

In Australia it is necessary to recognise that even in a so-called "first language" environment there will be a strong influence of English. At school the environment, is likely to be totally English (except in the relatively small number of bilingual schools which have been established). This situation leads us to raise a number of further questions some of which include: How long will a total first language last? What is the balance between the "first language" and English as the learner progresses through the different phases of schooling? What is the concomitant need for instruction in the target language and in English? What kinds of curriculum and approaches are most appropriate for the different learners?

Let us turn to the kinds of programs which are available.

The **range of provision** of language programs in Australia at present is wide. A variety of institutions (including systemic, independent, ethnic schools) provide languages programs; there are a significant number of primary school programs; programs may be bilingual (ranging from total bilingual programs, to transitional programs where children move gradually from "first language" to English in their primary school learning) or "limited exposure" programs where learners receive a limited amount of instruction each week in the target language as a subject. Variety also exists in practice regarding compulsion in language programs - between States and between schools. There is variety in allocation of time to programs, and also in the kinds of groupings of learners - streaming of learners may occur, especially in secondary schools; mixed ability and achievement classes are common and are often rendered necessary because of declining numbers. The current scenario across the

nation appears to be one of decline in secondary language programs, but growth in primary programs and schools and teachers are often required to group learners more than they would choose, in order to maintain provision.

ESL programs face similar challenges with a wide range of learners - from new arrivals to learners who have been in Australia for a number of years, to those background speakers who are in need of support in English so that they are able to reach their full potential in their study. A range of ESL programs exists to try to cater for these needs. It is important to note that the ESL learners and many of the LOTE learners (namely the background speakers) are frequently *the same group*, with the same needs relating to their language and general development. An adequate curriculum needs to be developed to cater for the range of languages, range of learners and range of programs.

1.2 Federal and state policies

In looking at any national educational endeavour in Australia in languages or in any other area of the curriculum, it is essential to recognise the fact that there are both federal and state education bodies, that there are federal policies and state policies on languages, and that there are federal policies and state policies on languages, and that there are federal curriculum initiatives and individual state initiatives.

At Federal level, the recent statement on a *National Policy on Languages* (1987) commissioned by the Minister of Education and written by Mr. Joe Lo Bianco is indicative of the Commonwealth Government's interest in improving the quality of provision of language education programs. Germaine to the National Language Policy is the notion of co-ordination of initiatives, and an emphasis on co-operation and collaboration, an issue which will be examined further in this paper.

At the State level, there are a number of different situations regarding language policy statements. There are various manifestations of policies, some are in a developmental

state (e.g. Western Australia), some have been formulated and are being implemented (e.g. South Australia). It is suggested, on the one hand, that this complex situation regarding federal and state policies and federal and state curriculum development makes for a more responsive education system because of the fact that needs and priorities will differ in each state and local education systems are in a position to take a more specific approach, yet on the other hand, in the present educational climate there are economic as well as educational arguments for the notion of national collaboration in languages education - many wheels are being reinvented all around the country, and not every state can afford to make adequate provision in the *range* of languages for the *range* of learners, particularly in languages.

At a time when language policies appear to be generally in place, at both the state and national level, there is a need to draw a link between policies and curriculum development. Policies provide statements of ideals which need to be met at a structural/organisational level, but closely allied to this those ideals need to be translated into classroom curriculum practice. Curriculum development in languages in Australia needs to be set in the context of the political reality of this country which has federal needs, but also individual State/Territory needs for a range of learners taking a range of programs in different languages.

A further feature of the context of languages education over the past few years was the awareness of new developments in the language teaching field. Research on the nature of language, on the manner in which language is learned, and on the role of language in personal development and learning has influenced and continues to influence the teaching of languages. The concern to focus on language is use for communication as well as on grammatical accuracy, the focus on the processes of talking, reading and writing as well as on the outcomes, means that the curriculum, syllabuses or programs of work need to be described in different ways from the traditional grammar-based approaches.

2.0 THE ALL PROJECT

The ALL Project was conceived and is evolving from these needs and influences: from the need for collaboration and cooperation in languages education in Australia in order to cater for the range of languages, language learners and kinds of programs; from the need to bridge the gap between policy and curriculum practice; and from the need to renew languages teaching, taking into account and making available to teachers the latest developments in research and in language teaching.

The ALL Project was set up in February 1985 through the joint efforts of the South Australian Education Department and the Curriculum Development Centre in the Schools Commission in Canberra. The Project's brief was to harness the energy and expertise of those involved in the teaching of languages throughout Australian order to produce a set of guidelines for the teaching of languages K-12 and to set in motion a process of teacher development to assist teachers in managing changes in languages education.

The focus of the Project has been on the *coordination of change,* with the purpose of:

- supporting and facilitating changes which have already been occurring in languages education;
- bringing a semblance of national level coherence to the languages field;
- producing materials namely a set of guidelines, which serve as a basis for this to occur.

The ALL Project's response to the Australian context has been in framework terms, attempting to provide a common conceptual base for all languages from which development in specific languages for specific contexts could emerge. The use of the word "framework" here does not imply a rigid structure; the Project in fact recognises and allows for different needs among languages, among learners, among teachers and schools, and among systems. At the same time however, the notion of framework does not imply a structure and set of guidelines which are so broad that they provide little or no guidance to teachers.

The ALL Project has developed two frameworks in response to languages curriculum needs in Australia, an *organisational framework,* and a *curriculum framework.*

The *organisational framework* is presented in the form of a Framework of Stages. This represents a means for describing in broad terms language learning at different phases of schooling. The Framework of Stages is designed to fulfil an educational as well as an administrative function. It addresses concerns in the following areas:

- administrative convenience - providing a way of dividing the learning continuum for any language into administratively convenient slices

- transition - providing a mechanism for continuity in language learning and allowing for multiple entry and exit points into language learning

- portability - facilitating continuity of learning for individual learners both within and between schools and systems.

- consideration of differences in language background of learners - providing schools with a mechanism for identifying what Stage(s) learners have reached, and in mixed ability classes a means for identifying the various groups of learners that might exist within the one class

- short-term goals - providing learners teachers and schools with a clearer concept of the learning goals, objectives and activities which are appropriate at different times, thereby maintaining motivation and allowing learners to progress at their own rate.

The ALL Project also provides a *curriculum framework* for teachers and syllabus writers in the shape of a set of guidelines. the guidelines are at present at the second draft/editorial stage and are due to be published by the end of this year.

In describing the curriculum guidelines it is important to indicate firstly how the ALL Project defines the term curriculum. The Project's view of the languages curriculum is a jigsaw of interlocking parts. These parts can be said to include:

- a syllabus, or plan of action, which outlines goals, content, carefully selected and sequenced activities and a methodological statement regarding the most appropriate way for these activities to be performed in the classroom;

- strategies for teaching and learning in the classroom, based on principles of learning (the Project has developed 8 principles of language learning);

- an assessment scheme, which is designed to monitor and measure learners' progress;

- learning resources (including people, materials and equipment);

- time, group and space allocations (a timetable, a class size, a classroom);

- strategies for evaluating all aspects of the curriculum as it progresses.

The ALL Project emphasises that all parts are inextricably interrelated and no part of the curriculum jigsaw can exist in isolation. A change to one part of the curriculum will necessarily have an effect on all other parts; a change in assessment practices, for example, will inevitably lead to changes in classroom practices, just as changes in the objectives and content of a language learning program would logically lead to changes in assessment procedures.

The guidelines materials, which will appear as a series of booklets make suggestions about syllabus and program development, methods to be used, resources, assessment, evaluation of the curriculum and teacher renewal.

In order to provide a flavour of the curriculum guidelines developed by the ALL Project I shall briefly examine thee of the major features which underpin their development, namely:

(1) the principles of language learning

(2) the goals of language learning, in particular the communication goals and

(3) the activities-base

Each of these will be discussed in turn.

(1) The principles of language learning

The ALL Project advocates a students curriculum based on the needs of the learners as:

- the users of the language that is being learnt;
- learners who are learning how to learn a language;
- unique individuals with their own personalities, needs and interests who possess a certain communicative background, a certain level of cognitive maturity and a certain level of emotional and attitudinal maturity in their relationships with other people.

The 8 principles developed by the ALL Project constitute a way of responding to these various needs. They are as follows:

Students learn a language best when:

(1) they are treated as individuals with their own needs and interest;

(2) they are provided with opportunities to participate in communicative use of the target language in a wide range of activities;

(3) they are exposed to communicative data which is comprehensible and relevant to their own needs and interests;

(4) they focus deliberately on various language forms, skills, and strategies, in order to support the process of spontaneous language acquisition;

(5) they are exposed to socio-cultural data and direct experience of the culture(s) embedded within the language that they are learning;

(6) they become aware of the role and nature of language and of culture;

(7) they are provided with adequate feedback about their progress;

(8) they are provided with the opportunity to manage their own learning.

(2) The goals of language learning

Using the 8 principles of language learning as a base and as a result of a process of consultation involving school principals, curriculum developers, advisers, consultants and a number of teachers in the various States/territories, the ALL Project outlines common goals which are considered appropriate in a languages program. Five different categories of goals are described. These include:

communication goals
sociocultural goals
learning-how-to-learn goals
language and cultural awareness goals
and knowledge goals

Though these are presented as separate categories of goals it is emphasised that they are all interrelated in the language curriculum with the central place being accorded to the communication goals.

The communication goals are defined in the following way:

To enable the leaner to:

- establish and maintain relationships and discuss topics of interest e.g. through the exchange of
  - information
  - ideas
  - opinions
  - attitudes
  - feelings
  - experiences
  - plans etc
- participate in social interaction related to:
  - the solving of a problem
  - the making of decisions with others
  - participating in transactions to obtain goods, services and public information
- obtain information by searching for specific details in a spoken or written text and then process and use the information obtained
- obtain information by listening to or reading a spoken or written text as a whole and then process and use the information obtained
- give information in spoken or written form on the basis of personal experience (e.g. give a talk, or write an essay or set of instructions)
- listen to, read or view and respond personally to a stimulus (e.g. story, play, film, song, film, picture)
- be involved in spoken and written personal expression (e.g. story, dramatic, episode, poem, play etc)

The communication goals, with the addition of the sociocultural goals, learning-how-to-learn goals, language and cultural awareness goals and the knowledge goals can be used to generate objectives and activities in the language program.

(3) The activities-base

In the ALL Project the activity is seen as the central unit of teaching and learning. The Project's definition states that:

> an activity involves the purposeful and active
> use of language where learners are required to
> call spontaneously upon their language resource
> to meet the needs of a given situation

This definition implies that in an activity learners will be achieving a purpose and making meaning, using the target language to achieve this purpose; it implies that participants in an activity will not be totally aware of what language will be used next, or what meanings will be exchanged next. This definition carries the notion of purposeful language use in a wide range of activities and of exposure to comprehensible and relevant communicative data (as described in principles 2 & 3).

This is not to say that focussing on structure or other language elements is not valued or essential in activity-based learning. The ALL Project defines as exercises the types of teaching and learning occurring in the classroom which focus on particular items of language, knowledge , skills, or strategies in order to " feed" the learning process.

Since the ALL Project, the activity is central to the teaching/learning process, the *activity-type* has been developed as the organising principle of syllabus design. The activity and activity-type organisation has been adopted since it is within the activity that the various elements of language are brought together.

The conceptualisation of language use in the classroom, using the activity-types as the organising unit, is set out in a 'table of language use' (see table) which presents three dimensions of language use namely the interpersonal dimension, the information dimension and the aesthetic dimension, modes of language use or combination of skills and 6 broad activity-types. The table is presented in Appendix 1.

In summary then, the ALL curriculum guidelines propose a learner-centred curriculum where a rich array of activities lead learners to meet objectives and goals which are described explicitly and based on principles of language learning.

In attempting to respond to such a varied picture of languages education as presented in the first part of this paper it was essential that the guidelines produced by the ALL Project provide sufficient guidance to assist teachers, syllabus planners, policy makers and teacher educators but at the same time it was essential that they be sufficiently flexible to allow for two levels of adaptation: firstly on the basis of the specific language and secondly in response to local system needs, conditions and specific groups of leaners. The ALL Project's conceptualisation of language learning which is proposed in the frameworks described is designed to provide the balance between guidance and prescription.

The ALL Project, as a national undertaking, could have been viewed as a curriculum exercise far removed from classroom teachers. This was seen as totally undesirable. Throughout its evolution consequently there has been an attempt to build a link between insights emerging from recent research in applied linguistics on the one hand and teacher experience on the other. The curriculum materials which have emerged are the result of extensive consultation with practitioners and are a guide for practitioners to assist them in responding to the curriculum needs in languages education.

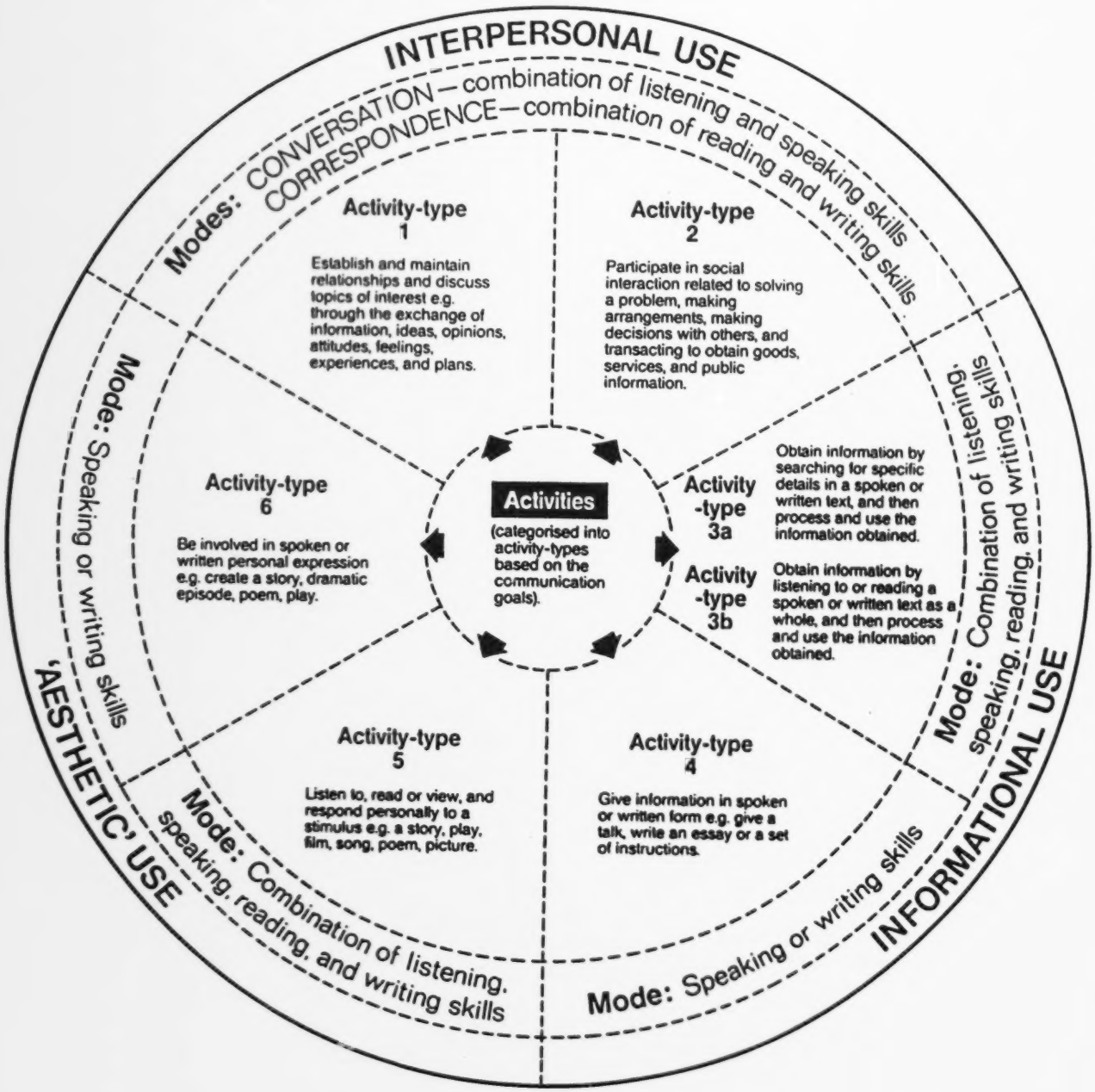
It has recently been suggested by ESL specialists that the curriculum framework represented in the ALL Project is theoretically and methodologically applicable to ESL. Although it is recognised that ESL will need certain extensions and adaptations to suit the particular types of programs in ESL, (e.g. in ESL support across the curriculum) the concept of working from a common curriculum base, which the ALL Project provides, is one which deserves consideration.

Having come almost to the final stage of the materials development phase of the Project we are in a better position to look towards the future, possibly to present an ideal view. The developments with the National Policy on Languages provide a favourable political climate. The spirit of cooperation and notion of coordination which the National Policy on Languages Report advocates is being supported by directors of curriculum in the various state/territory education department in Australia. Curriculum development in languages using the *ALL Guidelines* as a basis is about to begin in some specific languages: in an Aboriginal language, in Italian and Japanese. The relationship between the *ALL Guidelines* and ESL will be examined over the next few months. Pilot projects involving the ALL materials and their applications at classroom level have been established in very different ways in Victoria and South Australia. Systems across Australia are examining ways of applying the principles of the ALL Project for curriculum renewal and associated teacher development in their particular context. The various initiatives I have mentioned will provide us with a wealth of information about the process of curriculum renewal in languages education at local and national level based on the *ALL Guidelines.* Such information, together with continuing developments in applied linguistic research will enable us to constantly review, refine and modify the *ALL Guidelines* just as teachers are asked to engage in a continuous process of renewal of their own curriculum in order to cater in a more responsive way to the needs of their students.

The ALL Project is providing a catalyst for action in languages curriculum development. It is hoped that when the Project ceases to exist, mechanism or organisation might be established to act as a clearing house for developments in languages curriculum which can be shared nationally, to advise on appropriate modes of teacher development and finally to carry out the necessary research associated with meeting the changing languages curriculum development needs in Australia.

A. Scarino - National Coordinator - ALL Project
P. McKay - Project Officer - ALL Project

APPENDIX 1 TABLE OF LANGUAGE USE


INTERPERSONAL USE
Modes: CONVERSATION — combination of listening and speaking skills
CORRESPONDENCE — combination of reading and writing skills
Activity-type 1
Establish and maintain relationships and discuss topics of interest e.g. through the exchange of information, ideas, opinions, attitudes, feelings, experiences, and plans.
Activity-type 2
Participate in social interaction related to solving a problem, making arrangements, making decisions with others, and transacting to obtain goods, services, and public information.
Activities
(categorised into activity-types based on the communication goals).
Activity -type 3a
Obtain information by searching for specific details in a spoken or written text, and then process and use the information obtained.
Activity -type 3b
Obtain information by listening to or reading a spoken or written text as a whole, and then process and use the information obtained.
Mode: Combination of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills
INFORMATIONAL USE
Activity-type 4
Give information in spoken or written form e.g. give a talk, write an essay or a set of instructions.
Mode: Speaking or writing skills
Activity-type 5
Listen to, read or view, and respond personally to a stimulus e.g. a story, play, film, song, poem, picture.
Mode: Combination of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills
Activity-type 6
Be involved in spoken or written personal expression e.g. create a story, dramatic episode, poem, play.
Mode: Speaking or writing skills
'AESTHETIC' USE